

Chairman Henry and members of the committee, for the record my name is **Jennifer Whitmire**. I live at 2455 Windsor Ct. in Missoula. This is my son **Kyle**.

Kyle was born in 2001 with severe brain damage which left him with quadriplegia, a seizure disorder and developmentally the age of a 2 month old baby. This situation has left Kyle 100% dependant on my husband and I. He is our first of three children. My husband and I waited 6 years to have children after we were married but nothing could prepare us for the overwhelming responsibilities and sleepless nights we would endure having a special needs child.

Kyle, like all special needs children, requires many services such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, special diets, adaptive equipment and respite services. All of these things improve the quality of his life. The support staff that helps us to maintain Kyle's health and therapy goals is family, close friends, medical staff and CDC (child devel center).

In Kyle's 7 years, CDC has assisted our family with adaptive equipment, habitationaial aides for continuing therapy and respite services. Kyle now has a DD Medicaid waiver slot that has allowed our family the opportunity to give Kyle better medical care. We are so thankful for this.

One very important service our family receives from CDC is respite. Currently, respite is delivered in a flexible format. This flexibility is essential to our family in a number of ways.

1. First, knowing the care giver is essential. Because Kyle is so complex, medically and emotionally, it is crucial that we have someone we know and trust to stay with Kyle when we take a much needed break. Not only do we have to be comfortable with this person, Kyle must know and trust this person as well.
2. Second, the respite provider needs to understand how Kyle communicates. Kyle is non-verbal. He communicates by, smiling, laughing or crying. Only the friends and family that are closest to Kyle know when he is happy or in pain.
3. Third, understanding Kyle's ever-changing medical needs is crucial to Kyle's care. Kyle has a feeding tube which is his only source of nutrition. He is given many medications throughout the day. It is so important that a respite provider be prepared to handle any problems that may arise with medications or feeding issues.
4. Lastly, saving the state of Montana money is another reason respite should remain flexible. Recruiting, hiring, and training providers can be costly. By having the families hire their own providers you eliminate many costs associated with hiring employees.

We would like to take this opportunity to ask all of you to keep the respite program as flexible as it has been in the past. By keeping it flexible you will allow Kyle, and kids just like him, the best possible care and save the state of Montana money at the same time.

Our family would like to thank you for funding the services Kyle receives and urge you to keep funding these programs for us and all families with special kids.